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RAIDERS UNDETECTED BY U.S. RADAR PLANE

A Surveillance Jet in Saudi Arabia
Had Sensors Focused on Iran

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, June 9 — The United States was unaware of the Israeli air strike into Iraq until four hours after it took place, despite the presence of American radar planes in Saudi Arabia and other intelligence resources in the region, a Pentagon spokesman said today.

The spokesman, Henry E. Catto Jr., said the Government saw no reason to be concerned that the intelligence services had not discovered that the raid was planned or in progress.

Mr. Catto reported new details of the raid as passed on today to the Pentagon by Israeli officers. He expressed grudging admiration for what he called the "surgical precision" of the bombing, but joined other Government spokesmen in condemning the action itself.

The destruction of the Iraqi nuclear plant came as "a thunderous surprise," Mr. Catto said.

"We had absolutely no foreknowledge of this," he said of the Israelis' raid. "You cannot but admire their technical proficiency, which is what they displayed, but we strongly condemn the act."

F-16's Did the Bombing

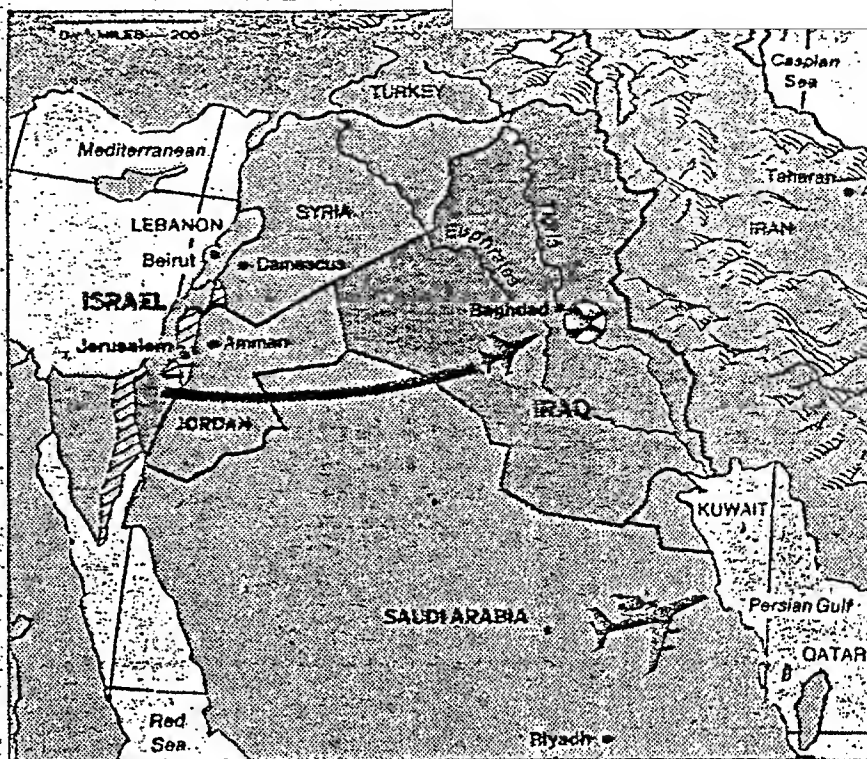
The Israeli strike force was disclosed to have consisted of eight F-16's, which did the bombing, and six F-15's, which provided protective cover. Yesterday some American officials thought the bombing had been done by F-4 Phantoms.

The Israelis hit their target at 6:30 P.M. Sunday, Baghdad time (11:30 A.M. Eastern daylight time). Mr. Catto said Israeli officials informed the American Embassy in Tel Aviv at 3:40 P.M.

The spokesman said United States radar planes in Saudi Arabia could not monitor the Israeli raid because they were too far away and were focused in a different direction.

Mr. Catto said a radar plane on patrol at the time had its sensor equipment was focused east across the Persian Gulf toward Iran and not to the north, where the Israelis were flying. The plane saw "not a single, solitary blip" on its screen.

The United States sent four of the \$130



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Line indicates path of Israeli jets over Jordan and Saudi Arabia on way to hit Iraqi reactor (cross). First reports had said jets skirted Jordan.

million planes to Saudi Arabia in September, after the Iraqi-Iranian war broke out. Defense officials said the planes generally patrol at about 30,000 feet over northeastern Saudi Arabia.

The radar planes are packed with sensors that can pick up low-flying planes 250 miles away and high-flying planes 350 miles away. Mr. Catto said the mission and operations of the radar planes would not be changed because of the raid.

The briefing by Israeli officers this morning, together with other information from American sources and from a knowledge of Israeli tactics, enabled American military analysts to reconstruct the raid.

According to the analysts, deception was crucial, and for several days before the raid the Israeli planes flew training exercises. The actual raid was made to look like a routine training drill.

The strike force refueled shortly after takeoff, because getting aloft consumes much fuel, then flew at a high altitude over Jordan, using Jordanian tactics and Jordanian call signs to appear to any radar operator like a Jordanian training mission. Before the Israeli briefing, it was thought by the Americans that the raiders had sought to avoid Jordan.

The flight continued over the northern corner of Saudi Arabia and into Iraq, dropping to a few hundred feet to elude

Iraqi radar. As the F-16's closed on the target, they climbed to take aim. At the same time, the F-15's took a blocking position between the target and the nearest Iraqi air base. The planes also turned on their radar jammers.

The F-16's dropped 2,000-pound bombs on the target with such precision that reconnaissance photographs showed all direct hits and no craters from misses. The Israelis told the Americans that they had used conventional bombs, not precision-guided bombs as thought yesterday.

The analysts said that, so far as they could determine, no Iraqi fighters rose to meet the Israelis nor did Iraq's Soviet-made missile launchers fire any surface-to-air missiles.

Secretary of Energy James B. Edwards said in a news conference that, "to my knowledge, there was no release of radioactivity" as a result of the raid. Israeli officials said the raid had been timed before the installation of nuclear fuel to avoid the escape of radiation.

The American analysts said the Israeli strike force, which suffered no losses, returned by a different but generally parallel route, with the F-16's again refueling in flight. They said the refueling could have come from a high-flying tanker posing as an airliner or from a smaller, low-flying tanker in a trickier maneuver.